



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION  
THE SECRETARY

January 10, 1997

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Mr. William Caton  
Acting Secretary  
Federal Communications Commission  
1919 M Street, NW, Room 222  
Washington, DC 20554

Re: Docket # 96-45

Dear Mr. Caton:

In accordance with regulations of the Federal Communications Commission, I am sending two copies of a letter that I sent to Chairman Hundt today concerning the captioned proceeding.

Yours sincerely,

  
Richard W. Riley

Enclosures

cc: Honorable Reed Hundt, Chairman

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Honorable Reed E. Hundt  
Chairman  
Federal Communications Commission  
1919 M Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20554

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Re: Docket #96-45

Dear Chairman Hundt:

On behalf of the nation's students, parents, and teachers, I commend the Federal-State Joint Board on Universal Service for its recommended decision on schools and libraries. The Clinton Administration is strongly committed to the prompt deployment of advanced telecommunications services to every school and library in America. The Joint Board's recommended decision goes a long way in ensuring that all schools and libraries have access to the vast educational resources available on the Internet and are able to prepare our students for the 21st century. This is very good for America's students and growth in American jobs and business.

The Department of Education continues to work closely with the National Telecommunication and Information Administration (NTIA) at the Department of Commerce to ensure that the Joint Board's recommendation is carried out in a coordinated, timely and equitable manner. We fully support the NTIA comments pertaining to schools and libraries as filed with the Federal Communications Commission on January 10, 1997. In particular, we want to take this opportunity to highlight several key points included in the filing.

The Joint Board's recommended level of support is not excessive. In fact, schools already spend about \$4 billion annually on hardware and software and that number is growing. Affordable access to telecommunications is critical to long-term sustainable use of technology. To assure that there is sufficient funding, we suggest that the trigger be lowered to the level recommended by NTIA. In addition, the discount rate structure for the poorest schools in high-cost areas should be raised to 95 percent.

We continue to support eligibility for the Free and Reduced Priced Lunch (FRPL) program as a poverty indicator for determining discounts. For the purpose of determining their discount, private schools do not need to subscribe to the FRPL program; they must simply determine the

Page 2 - Honorable Reed E. Hundt

number of students that would be eligible if they were participating in the FRPL program. Since libraries are not eligible for the FRPL program, a different indicator will be necessary. We support NTIA's recommendation as a reasonable approach in determining the discount for libraries.

Schools will need internal connections, appropriate software, hardware, and teacher training to make the most of telecommunications technology. That is why we fully support the inclusion of internal connections in the Joint Board's recommended decision. The Clinton Administration's Technology Literacy Challenge Fund will help support local efforts to train teachers and ensure that the appropriate hardware and software tools are available. Schools and libraries will also need technical assistance in planning, bidding, and implementing technology. The fund administrator should provide technical assistance and the Department of Education's Regional Technology Education Consortia (RTECs) can greatly assist in these areas.

Finally, our schools and libraries must not become depositories for obsolete technologies. Periodic review by the FCC will help ensure that schools and libraries are kept technologically current. This review process should be undertaken as needed.

I look forward to the Commission's final decision and we will continue to work with you to ensure that the implementation of the final decision is a success. Schools and libraries are key to ensuring that we do not widen the gap between the technological haves and have nots. This proceeding goes a long way toward improving education and ensuring that all Americans can benefit from the information age and a growing economy.

In accordance with FCC regulations on ex parte proceedings, I have filed two copies of this letter with the Secretary of the Federal Communications Commission.

/  
Yours sincerely,

  
Richard W. Riley

cc: Mr. William Caton